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ABSTRACT

John Austin's notion of illocutionary force is explored within the context of the speech act in the total speech situation; definitions of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are reviewed. It is argued that illocutionary acts are performatives that occur within a complete communication situation in which the key element is the interaction of the speaker and listener in constituting the force of the utterance. The notion of "force" should be understood as the phenomenon of uptake which a speaker offers by speaking and which a listener achieves by understanding what he or she hears as a certain state of affairs. This account allows for a distinction between locutionary acts of merely uttering words and illocutionary acts where the utterance carries an effect within one communicative situation. Finally, the notion of force as being primarily constituted by uptake allows a distinction between illocutionary effect and perlocutionary effect where the latter requires a secondary act in consequence of the original act of speaking. We discover that in communication a person may understand without being persuaded and that persuasion may be empty information. (AA)

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COMMUNICATION AND AUSTIN'S NOTION OF "UPTAKE"

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Communication succeeds best in an atmosphere of common knowledge, so I would like to begin by giving you a brief, if not entirely accurate, account of myself as an academic who happens to be speaking here today.

Some few years ago, not as many as I would like for proper credibility, I was a Sophomore at the University of New Mexico. I had a full year of university studies behind me and was confidently prepared to coast out the rest of my undergraduate career in relative ease. Well armed with this superb naivete I decided on taking two courses that would de facto generate six semester hours of "A" for myself. One of those courses was "Introduction to Communication Theory" which was a sure thing since I believed myself to already possess a refined concept of how to talk, having done it for a number of years. And, the other class was "Philosophy of Language" which I of course knew would take up some speculative problems, but then I also already knew how to think, the proof being my survival as a Freshman student. As you might guess, I quickly discovered that I knew precious little about either communicating or thinking, much less the ways in which the two are bound together.

I am still working on the coherence of philosophy and communication which accounts for two attitudes toward my credibility. My friends in the field of communication think of me as the philosopher who cannot talk very well because of the abnormal preoccupation and fascination with concepts, and, my friends in philosophy think of me as the rhetorician whose unfortunate illness of ubiquitous discussion betrays a lack of healthy respect for logic. For all of my friends I want to make an effort at consensus or coherence depending on which discipline you choose to associate me with today, hence my topic "Communication and Austin's Notion of 'Uptake'."

Specifically, I want to explore John Austin's explanation of illocutionary force within, as he calls it in his Twelveth Harvard Lecture, "the total speech act in the total speech situation." I want to argue that illocutionary force is accounted for in large measure by the phenomenon that Austin calls "uptake." My account depends on first establishing that the total speech act in the total speech situation is what we commonly refer to as "communication." Second, I think it necessary and useful to examine Austin's account of performative utterances as a means of excluding certain aspects of the total situation which do not relate to the "uptake" phenomenon within communication conceived as an object of philosophical analysis. Finally, I propose to explore the nature of the illocutionary speech act as an account of human interpersonal communication as opposed to soliloquy or public address to a large unresponsive audience.

Our first concern is a specification of "communication" as a complete human, intersubjective act occuring in a given situation. Hubert Alexander, who was my teacher in that sophomore encounter with the philosophy of language, offers this explanation of interpersonal communication in his book The Language and Logic of Philosophers:

> Communication may be thought of as involving four elements: (1) The communicator, or sender of the message, (2) the communicatee, or recipient of the message, (3) the transmitting and receiving devices, which in simple speaking are merely one's vocal cords and ears, and (4) the message itself. But upon further analysis the message turns out to be a complex of at least four ingredients. These are (1) the object, event or situation to which reference is made; (2) the manner in which the communicator or comunicatee conceives this object, event, or situation; (3) the set of symbols used to convey the communicator's

concept; and (4) the background experiences, attitudes, and knowledge which affect the manner of conceiving on the part of either the communicator or communicatee.

All of these elements of interpersonal communication are comparable with Austin's discussion of performative utterances in the Harvard Lectures; indeed, at one point or another he takes up each of these aspects of the total speech situation. A large part of this analysis will become obvious as we briefly review the types of speech acts.

But for the moment, I want to call attention to the fourth element in Alexander's definition of communication, namely, the "message." The message is a basic notion which Austin sets about exploring with his theory of performative utterances. He is clear in pointing out that an articulated message has a "force" which must stand as an element of communication over and above the meaning of a message conceived as language with a certain sense and reference. He is careful to note that the perceived tone of voice, cadence, and emphasis are often forgotten in the analysis of a message, not to mention the nonverbal behavior of the people concerned in the exchange of the message. Finally, Austin suggests that the circumstance of the utterance is perhaps the greatest source of ambiguity with respect to interpreting the "force" of the message. All of these concerns with the message portion of a speech act suggest that Austin is thinking of the total speech act as "communication" which is to say an interpersonal action whose performance defines a situation.

I want to stress interpersonal action because the specific act depends on both the speaker and the listener for its "force." This is to argue that the concept we are calling a "message" not only describes the act of uttering by the speaker, but it also describes the act of hearing by the listener. The "force" of the message, as opposed to its meaning, stands as a singular

object of both the speaker's expression and the listener's perception. If I might make a parenthetical comment here, this seems to me to be an illustration of the sense in which Edmund Husserl claimed that subjectivity is bound up within intersubjectivity. The key question, then, centers on the description and explanation that one can offer for a communication situation. Austin argues that one clear set of distinctions can be found in the nature of the message. Some utterances are clearly descriptions and we can judge their meaning and force (if I can misuse the term "force" for a moment) to be true or false on their face as situations which we know to be the case or not. With these so-called "constative" utterances there is a clear interpersonal message whose sense and reference can be tested by the parties to the conversation. It is in this derivative sense that I am using the label "force," namely that the testing of the message will determine whether or not it is to count as a genuine communication, after the fact that it has been used and understood.

In comparison to the "constative" utterance, Austin describes the "performative" utterance in which the issuing of the utterance itself is the performing of an action. The famous example is the verb "promise." In saying "I promise to be here today" I am performing the act of promising. Performatives pose a problem since they fall outside the realm of being either true or false. The best that one can hope for is a test of efficacy. The performative is dependent, as Austin says, upon "appropriate circumstances" which suggest that the performative is happy or unhappy, felicitous or infelicitous. This is just the point that I am after in my analysis. It appears to me that "appropriate circumstances" is a call to remember all the elements that constitute a communication, specifically those elements of the message that are linked

to the act of communicating in which the listener takes up the force of the speaker's utterance. However, I do not want to get ahead of myself.

Let us briefly review Austin's categories or types of performative speech acts. First, there is the locutionary act "which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference." Second, there are illocutionary acts such as informing, promising, ordering, and warning which have a certain conventional force. And third, the perlocutionary act is an utterance which produces certain consequences or effects, that is the act is brought about by the saying of something. Austin does remind us that these distinctions are abstractions and that in the total speech act situation the performance of an illocutionary act automatically includes the performance of a locutionary act. I suspect the same is true for perlocutionary acts, although I do not recall Austin saying so in so many words.

I think it important to suggest how these performative categories are perceived by a communication theorist. For example, Jerrold Sadock in his book Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts suggested these interpretations of Austin's performatives. First, locutionary acts are acts that are performed in order to communicate. The specification of such acts fall to the discipline of linguistics since the concern here is with phonetics, phonology, syntax, and linguistic semantics. Second, illocutionary acts are speech acts that we accomplish by communicating our intent to accomplish them. Being a matter of conceptual interpretation these acts belong to the discipline of philosophy. Third, perlocutionary acts are the by-products of acts of communication in that they produce consequences or secondary effects. Such studies are the domain of rhetoric. In my own view, Sadock's presentation is not conceptually different from that of Austin. However, Sadock's version serves to underline in a more direct way the necessity of viewing performatives as interpersonal acts,

rather than linear acts of the speaker. This distinction seems to me to be at the heart of distinguishing meaning from force in illocutionary acts. Let me explain further.

I have suggested that illocutionary force is connected with the notion of "uptake" and I have hinted that communication as a concept points to interpersonal behavior that is by nature conventional. Austin specificies that "an effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out." He goes on to explain in a manner that I take to be an accurate account of interpersonal communication where the message has meaning in the normal sense and at the same time is dependent upon the listener's recognition of the utterance "force" to count as an action that is either happy or felicitous. Austins states: "Generally, the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and the force of a locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake." Thus, we say that an illocutionary act "takes effect" in a certain way as distinguished from producing consequences which necessarily fall into the realm of perlocutionary acts.

Uptake, then, creates a state of affairs which are normal and appropriate, or as Austin would say happy and felicitous, to both the speaker and the listener. This state of affairs is recognizable as illocutionary because the speaker issues an utterance which on its face is locutionary, it has sense and reference for the speaker and the listener alike. The utterance is simultaneously illocutionary since the force of the utterance is performance by the speaker for listener, that is, the actual articulation is the carrying out of the sense and reference. Austin provides this example: Thus "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth" has the effect of naming or christening the ship; then certain subsequent acts such as referring to it as the Generalissimo Stalin will be out

of order. In other words, the illocutionary act is an utterance which performs or carries out an action the meaning of which is taken as a specified state of affairs. The act is carried out by the listener in deference to the speaker's intention. It becomes clear that the performance has excluded the possibilities of other states of affair as either appropriate or conventional. It is in this context that Austin suggests: "We have said that many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or sequel, which may be one-way or two-way." Consequently, the point of my analysis is that illocutionary force should be viewed from the point of view of a listener; indeed, Austin in one passage says that force in illocutionary utterances amounts to "how it is to be taken."

I think I can now suggest that illocutionary force occurs when the speaker secures uptake from his listener, that is, when the listener understands the utterance as conforming to the conventions of performing actions by the uttering of given words. Such a constituted situation in turn conforms to the definition of communication that we examined earlier. In fact, Austin argues that the failure of a performative is directly tied into all the elements that constitute interpersonal communication. Talking about the unhappy or infelicitous utterance as performative, he says: "Perhaps I did not take it as an order or was not anyway bound to take it as an order. The person did not take it as a promise: i.e. in the particular circumstance he did not accept the procedure, on the ground that the ritual was incompletely carried out by the original speaker."

In such a case at this, the issue is not the meaning of the utterance for it is understood, it carries sense and reference. Rather, the issue is the illocutionary force which is absent since uptake was unsuccessful as a one-way process or uptake was plainly refused as a two-way sequel. For example, a small child may hit his baseball and break his father's window. Upon confron-

tation by the father the child offers a hopeful defense by saying: "I promise I didn't do it." There is sense and reference here. The father understands what the child is saying. However, the illocutionary force of the performative "I promise" is unhappy and infelicitous. Uptake is not possible for the father. From a communication theory point of view, we can say that the oral words of the child can count as an act of communication, but this is to isolate the uttered words from the total speech act in the total speech situation. Which is, of course, something the father refuses to do since it involves a state of affairs that is properly to be excluded by the illocutionary force of the utterance "I promise ..."

In conclusion, I have argued that illocutionary acts are performatives that occur within a complete communication situation in which the key element is the interaction of the speaker and listener in constituting the force of the utterance. I have argued that force should be understood as the phenomenon of uptake which a speaker offers by speaking and which a listener achieves by understanding as a certain state of affairs what he hears.

This account, I believe, allows for a serious distinction between locutionary acts of merely uttering words and illocutionary acts where the utterance carries an effect within one communicative action as between speaker and listener. Finally, the notion of force as being primarily constituted by uptake allows a distinction between illocutionary effect and perlocutionary effect where the latter requires a secondary act in consequences of the original act of speaking. In a epigrammatic sense, we discover that in communication a person may understand without being persuaded and that persuasion may be empty information.

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